

**Opening Statement Of
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chairwoman
Subcommittee On Water Resources and Environment
Full Committee Hearing On
“The 35th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act”
October 18, 2007**

Mr. Chairman, thank-you for holding this hearing that celebrates the 35th anniversary of the Clean Water Act. It is, as you note yourself, an opportunity to rejoice, as well as one on which we should reflect.

Thirty-five years ago today, this Congress overrode President Nixon's veto of the Clean Water Act by a massive bipartisan margin. Members on both sides of the aisle recognized that the old system for protecting water quality was a failure. Clear as the eye could see, America's waters were dying, pollution unchecked, and waste rampant. America's rivers were literally its sewers, its lakes, cesspools.

In responding to the Nixon veto, Senator Muskie famously asked his colleagues in the Senate, “Can we afford clean water? Can we afford rivers and lakes and streams and oceans which continue to make life possible on this planet? Can we afford life itself? ..These questions answer themselves.”

The Congress – House and Senate, Republicans and Democrats – answered these questions and affirmed their original vote to pass the Clean Water Act. That vote turned out to be a great victory for the American public and the health of America's waters and wetlands.

Through the Clean Water Act, a strong partnership developed between the Federal and state governments that has resulted in significant improvements in clean water. This historic legislation has been responsible for protecting our aquatic resources, preserving environmental quality, and protecting public health. Without its protections we would run the risk that rivers would return to their original role of being carriers of waste, toxics and disease. The combination of enforceable national standards, increased funding for water treatment facilities, and an effective partnership with the states has meant vast improvements in the nation's water quality.

Nevertheless, we would be ill-advised to let our clean water guard down. While many of the nation's waters are cleaner than they once were, at least one third remain impaired. Many of the great waters across the country – the Great Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Chesapeake Bay – are still struggling to survive because of continued pollution.

The National Academy of Sciences released a report this week on Mississippi River Water Quality and the Clean Water Act. They note that while the Clean Water Act has reduced some pollution, the Mississippi still faces many pollution problems, and implementation of the Act remains an issue.

In my own state of Texas, water pollution is still a major problem. EPA data shows that 53 percent of the state's major industrial and wastewater plants have recently failed to meet

Clean Water Act standards. Texas also ranked fourth in the country for the total number of clean water violations.

As these examples show, it is clear that we cannot rest in our efforts to protect the nation's waters. Water transcends both boundaries and generations. While it is something that an individual can use and pollute – it is not something that an individual can own. Because it is inherently a shared resource, it is a national responsibility. Therefore it is a national imperative that we be diligent in protecting our precious water resources.

Only through full implementation of the Clean Water Act, in which we fulfill its central goal of restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical and biological integrity of all of the Nation's waters, will we realize our obligations of clean water for all Americans.

Mr. Chairman, thank-you for holding this hearing, and thank-you for all of your work in protecting American's waters and wetlands.